

REMARKS

The application is believed to be in condition for allowance.

There are no formal matters pending.

Claims 1-2 and 4-7 stand rejected as obvious over SCHROTER 6,131,950 in view of LANG 5,536,043.

Applicants appreciate the detail of the rejection and the Response to Arguments section of the Official Action.

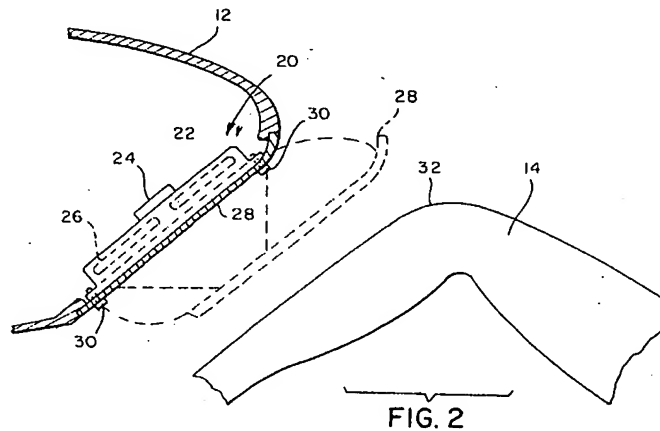
On page 4, paragraph 2, the Official Action acknowledges that SCHROTER does not teach the recited sheath forming the side wall of the inflatable structure and comprising an open first end fixed to the support and an open second end fixed to the load-spreading plate, the load-spreading plate closing off the open second end to form the end wall of the inflatable structure. Specifically, the Official Action acknowledges that SCHROTER does not teach the recited sheath forming with an open second end fixed to the load-spreading plate, the load-spreading plate closing off the open second end to form the end wall of the inflatable structure.

The Official Action offers LANG as disclosing a knee bolster that teaches an air bag 26 with an open second end fixed to the load spreading plate 28. The Official Action reads the recited "sheath" onto air bag 26, referring only to Figure 5.

The Official Action misunderstands what is disclosed by LANG as to air bag 26. The air bag 26 is not the innovative part

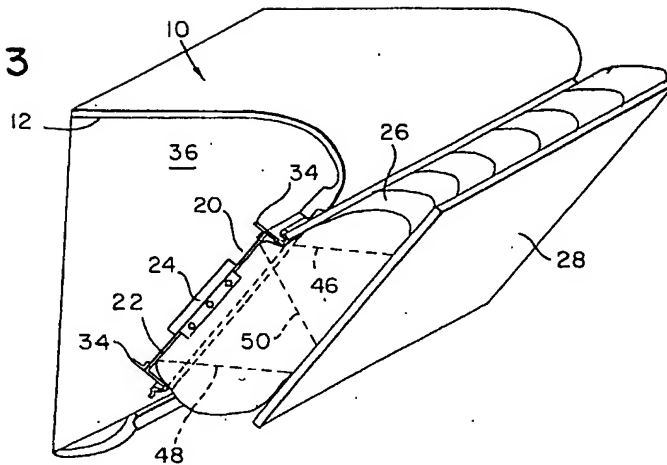
of the LANG invention and is not greatly detailed. LANG does not disclose the recited sheath structure and indeed any conclusion concerning an open second end or any connection of air bag 26 to knee bolster panel 28 is speculative.

In the DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT section, it is disclosed that Figure 2 shows the activated knee bolster 20 with a reaction canister 22, an inflator 24, an inflatable air bag 26 that is stored within the reaction canister 22, and a knee bolster panel 28. The knee bolster panel 28 also is shown by dotted lines in a deployed position closer to the leg 14 of the occupant.

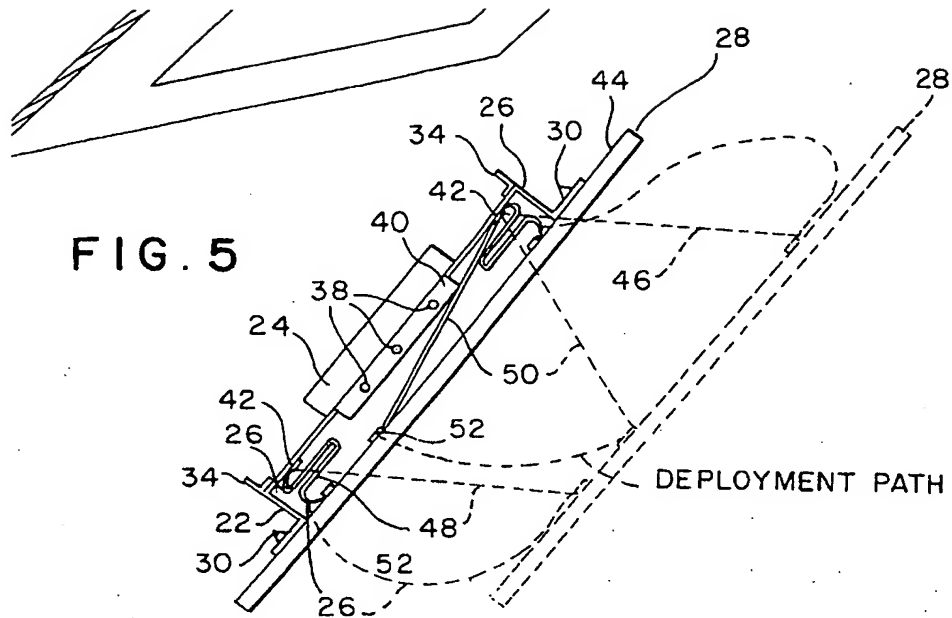


Beginning with line 21 of column 4 and as indicated in Figure 3, when deployed the air bag 26 is tubular in shape having a rectangular cross section.

FIG. 3



At one end of the tubular arrangement thereof, the air bag 26 is securely attached in any suitable sealing conventional manner, as by means of a suitable first retaining ring 42 (Figure 5 below), to the reaction canister 22, internally and adjacent the periphery thereof. At the other end thereof the air bag 26, when deployed, engages the forward facing wall 44 of the knee bolster panel 28.



When installed, in the automotive vehicle, as illustrated in FIG. 5, the air bag 26 is suitably folded and stored in the housing or reaction canister 22 between the inflator 24 and the panel 28. During deployment, pressure acting on the back of the panel 28 from the inflating air bag 26 creates a force sufficient to separate the panel 28 from the housing 22.

The LANG invention is about the tethers providing forces to resist the panel 28 when activated. Parallel tethers 46 and 48 and a diagonal or positional tether 50 are located internally of the inflatable air bag 26. The spaced parallel tethers 46 and 48 and the positional tether 50 are contained inside of the inflatable air bag 26 or bladder 26 so as not to

interfere with the deployment of the inflating air bag. The tethers direct movement to position the panel 28 in the proper location.

The inflated air bag 26 provides support to the entire surface area of the panel 28. Tethers 46 and 48 are attached to the panel 28 and the housing 22 at positions midway the width thereof (column 5, lines 30-34).

From the actual disclosure of LANG, one of skill can not determine that air bag 26 is connected to knee bolster panel 28 or that air bag 26 has an open second end. The drawing figures do not clearly show the air bag 26 in detail and rather provide only small scale illustrations using dotted lines.

Claim 1 recites an inflatable structure comprising a side wall and an end wall with a guide means guiding the structure as the structure deploys, wherein the guide means comprise the side wall of the structure which, in the deployed configuration, is substantially taut, and wherein a sheath forms the side wall of the inflatable structure.

The sheath is recited as comprising 1) an open first end fixed to the support and 2) an open second end fixed to the load-spreading plate, the load-spreading plate closing off the open second end to form the end wall of the inflatable structure.

LANG does disclose that the air bag 26 is securely attached in any suitable sealing conventional manner, as by means of a suitable first retaining ring 42 to the reaction canister

22, internally and adjacent the periphery thereof. Thus, a first open end is attached to the reaction canister 22.

There is, however, no disclosure of any second open end. Rather, LANG explicitly discloses that, when deployed, the air bag 26 engages the forward facing wall 44 of the knee bolster panel 28. Thus, LANG discloses a folded bag that upon being pressurized acts against and engages the wall 44 of knee bolster panel 28 such that the inflated air bag 26 provides support to the entire surface area of the panel 28. See from Figure 5 that the air bag 26 itself is not taut upon deployment but rather the tethers 46, 48 are taut.

In the present invention, the sheath serves as both the side wall and the guide means. Claim 1 requires the guide means comprise the side wall of the structure which, in the deployed configuration, is substantially taut, and wherein the sheath forms the side wall of the inflatable structure. The air bag 26 of LANG is not taut when deployed. The air bag 26 of LANG is not the guide means (rather the tethers are the guide means). Therefore, LANG does not disclose a sheath which is both the side wall and the guide means.

Further, LANG does not disclose that air bag 26 comprises an open second end fixed to the load-spreading plate, the load-spreading plate closing off the open second end to form the end wall of the inflatable structure.

Therefore, even if the two references were combined, SCHROTER modified in view of LANG would not teach the claimed invention.

The obviousness rejection is not well founded. Reconsideration and allowance of all the claims are respectfully requested.

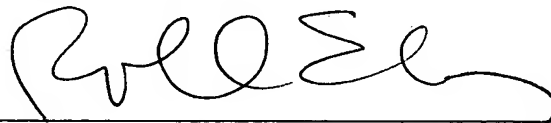
Applicants believe that the present application is in condition for allowance and an early indication of the same is respectfully requested.

Should there be any matters that need to be resolved, it is requested that the undersigned attorney be telephonically contacted.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 25-0120 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. § 1.16 or under 37 C.F.R. § 1.17.

Respectfully submitted,

YOUNG & THOMPSON



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Roland E. Long, Jr., Reg. No. 41,949  
745 South 23<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Arlington, VA 22202  
Telephone (703) 521-2297  
Telefax (703) 685-0573  
(703) 979-4709

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